



JOHN ENGLER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
FAMILY INDEPENDENCE AGENCY
LANSING



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To the editor:

Governor John Engler has declared May 2002 Foster Care Month in Michigan. The governor's announcement highlights the fact that an estimated 20,000 Michigan children and youth are living with about 8,000 foster care families.

Foster Care Month provides an opportunity to make Michigan residents more aware of the foster care services available in our state and of the untiring efforts of the various individuals, agencies and organizations that are dedicated to improving the foster care system.

This month is also a time to show special appreciation for foster families who opened their homes and hearts to foster children. They strive to offer the best care possible for children in need, not only during Foster Care Month, but on a daily basis.

Children usually enter foster care, at least temporarily, because their parents are unable or unwilling to care for them. Generally, children enter foster care because they have been abused or neglected at home. Foster care families are trained by the Family Independence Agency, the Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (MFAPA), and private child placing agencies to provide safe, stable and supportive homes for them.

When children have to be removed from their families because of abuse or neglect, they often don't understand why and are scared and confused. Suddenly, they're in a new environment, a new home, while their entire identity is still wrapped up in the parents, siblings, extended family, neighbors and friends they've left behind. Caring foster families help by easing their anxieties and making them feel loved and secure in unfamiliar new surroundings.

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Foster families play a vital role in the lives of children in crisis. They help reconnect children to families and steer them toward successful adulthood, or help them prepare for adoption by a permanent family once parental rights have been terminated by the court. We salute foster families during Foster Care Month and appreciate their efforts throughout the year.

Developing an adequate number of foster homes to meet the varied backgrounds of children entering foster care is a priority of the Family Independence Agency. In partnership with customers, communities, private agencies and MFAPA, the FIA cultivates quality foster care home placement resources and works to develop, train and support responsible families to provide safe nurturing environments for children placed in out-of-home care.

We provide monthly payments to reimburse foster families for some of the costs involved in caring for a child, clothing and holiday allowances, regional and statewide trainings, and help with the licensing process.

Foster parenting can be both challenging and rewarding. Helping vulnerable children through difficult times can be a very gratifying experience. Foster Care Month is a time to consider making an investment in Michigan's future through active participation in the foster care system. For more information about becoming a foster parent, please contact your local Family Independence Agency office.

Douglas E. Howard